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Pride Week's closing events push for campus diversity

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Pride Week's closing events push for campus diversity



CAMPUS PHOTO BY PAUL BERTSCHINGER

DRIVEN — GLAD Director Mary Bonauto spoke at the Women in the Curriculum lunch this past week on marriage equality.

GLAD director speaks at womens' lunch

By Maeghan Naimie
For The Maine Campus

Pride Week visited the Women's Studies Program's this past week, and brought its own unique spin to the long-running series. In honor of the week's events, Mary Bonauto, director of the Civil Rights Project at Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders GLAD gave a presentation called "The Future of Marriage Equality in New England: Massachusetts, Connecticut and Maine." Between thirty and forty people attended the presentation.

Bonauto spoke of her vision of the world, where sexual orientation doesn't matter, especially in regards to the law.

"We are part of an ongoing civil rights movement," Bonauto said.

The first part of the presentation outlined what Bonauto said were historical injustices that have created a society in which gays and lesbians are viewed as disgusting, vile and less than human.

Bonauto explained how being homosexual was considered a crime.

"In 1961, every state had a sodomy law," Bonauto said. "Now just imagine what it felt like to be told that your way of showing love and even your love for someone is thought of as illegal, and disgusting. It was also something that was actively sought out and punished."

She said historical injustices were rampant. There was no concern for a homosexual's rights as an individual and an American citizen. Men were arrested at night in their beds, as occurred 1986 Bowers vs.

Hardwick Supreme Court Case. In 1992, a judge said that the constitution did not protect gays and lesbians.

Bonauto said the outbreak of AIDS was a watershed event for homosexuals, forcing them to realize they had to stand up for their families.

"I got one call from a man crying from a pay phone. His partner had died and he could have no part of the funeral and his partner's biological family was also going through their apartment, taking things. There was noting that he could legally do without a will," she said.

Bonauto said the importance of the homosexual family became a major issue at that point. Homosexual parents could not both have the same responsibilities when it came to children, and they were denied the right to inherit their partners belongings when they died, or visit them in the intensive care unit.

She said there is an ongoing legislative war between those for and those against gay rights. She also said that many bills have come up attempting to nullify each other. A large part of the conversation was on the different states and their progress towards making gay marriage legal. According to Bonauto, this is a real issue among the states. Most places of employment will give homosexuals that have been married in a different state marriage benefits. This is still something that is very controversial.

Bonauto closed by saying that now is the time for people to stand up and make a difference.

Wilde Stein open house highlights group's services to UMaine

By Justin M. Wozniak
For The Maine Campus

The Wilde Stein Alliance for Sexual Diversity held an open house for all members of the University of Maine community to socialize with friends and faculty members this past week. The event was held as part of UMaine's Pride Week and was designed to showcase the organization's offerings to the university community.

The open house provided students with the opportunity to meet Wilde Stein members and learn about the organization. The event is held twice a year, once during Coming Out Week in the fall and Pride Week in the spring.

The organization's name is derived from Oscar Wilde and Gertrude Stein, two note worthy characters in the history of sexuality.

The group was created in 1973 and is one of the nation's oldest college GLBT community associations, according to President Shannon Perro. It is the oldest GLBT community association in Maine.

"Wilde Stein is where people can converse in a safe, open and accepting environment," Perro said. "People can discuss issues that are uncomfortable in other environments."

Wilde Stein is both an advocacy and social organization. Perro said the goal is not only to provide GLBT students with

a safe place to discuss issues, but also to raise awareness about GLBT issues facing students both now and after college.

"Those in the community are aware of most [GLBT] issues. Ask anyone walking down the street to define gay, lesbian or bisexual, and they can do it. Ask them about transgender, and they get confused," Perro said. "That's our goal, to educate, but not just on GLBT issues."

Some in the GLBT community also need to be more informed of issues they do not often think about, according to Perro. Wilde Stein provides an environment where people can safely discuss them. Wilde Stein meetings are confidential, and open to all students.

"It can be quite personal," Perro said.

Deans of Students Robert Dana and Associate Dean for Students Angel Loreda attended Thursday's open house.

"It is great that Wilde Stein has continued to grow," Loreda said. "I think it is great — the work they've been doing."

"Wilde Stein offers different avenues for the GLBT and allied student at UMaine. It's a support network, educational organization and advocacy group," GLBT Liaison to the Deans of Students Matthew Small said. "Some members are interested in all three, and some are only interested in

some of them."

Students who are coming out may seek a place to express themselves that is free from judgment, according to Small.

"For some students, a basic support system is all they're looking for," he said.

The GLBT Allies Council advises senior administrators, through the Deans of Students, about the concerns and needs of the GLBT community at UMaine. The council promotes education and awareness activities for the campus community and advocates for the inclusion of relevant material and approaches in academic curriculums. The council also advises the office of Equal Opportunity regarding issues of discrimination and harassment of GLBT community members, including faculty and staff.

Students who see "Safe Zone" stickers on office doors throughout campus are aware that GLBT issues can be addressed with faculty and staff in those offices. The safe zone sticker is a sign that GLBT students are a valued part of the diversity on campus.

The Rainbow Resource Center, located on the ground floor of Memorial Union provides resources for GLBT students and straight allies.

"People need to have a place where others understand what they're going through, and the support of straight allies is integral to that process," Small said.

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